

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 07290

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: CH, UR
SUBJECT: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: BANGKOK 9872

SUMMARY: SOVIET MFA SPECIALIST ON CHINA TOLD BRITISH
EMBOFF THAT PRAVDA APRIL 1 ARTICLE WAS DESIGNED TO SHOW
WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON THE BORDER ISSUE DURING AND SINCE
SEPT. 1969. HE DID NOT SUGGEST THAT THERE WAS ANY EARLY
PROSPECT FOR IL'ICHEV TO RETURN TO PEKING, NOR DID HE
SEE ANY EARLY PROSPECT FOR A CHANGE IN SINO-SOVIET
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RELATIONS. HE STATED THAT RENEWED CHINESE EMPHASIS WAS
BEING PLACED ON AGGRAVATING THE WORLD SITUATION THAT
CHINESE DIPLOMACY HAS BECOME MORE ACTIVE IN S.E.A.,
JAPAN AND INDIA; THAT WESTERN GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSMEN
WOULD NOT FIND CHINA A GOOD COMMERCIAL PARTNER, EITHER
IN THE MILITARY OR INDUSTRIAL AREAS; AND THAT, ALTHOUGH
OLDER ELEMENTS IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP WERE ANXIOUS

TO AVOID NEW LEADERSHIP CLASHES, THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL INSTABILITY EXISTS AS MANIFESTED IN THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUA AND TENG. REGARDING REFTEL, INDICATIONS HERE ARE THAT AMBASSADOR IL'ICHEV MAY HAVE BEEN OVERSTATING TENSIONS IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. BRITISH EMBOFF HAS GIVEN US THE FOLLOWING READOUT OF HIS APRIL 3 CALL ON DEPUTY CHIEF, SOVIET MFA'S FIRST FAR EAST DEPT., F. I. POTAPENKO (PORTIONS DEALING WITH MONGOLIA AND JAPAN HAVE BEEN REPORTED SEPTELS).

2. RECENT SINO-SOVIET EXCHANGES: POTAPENKO MADE NO ATTEMPT TO ARGUE THAT THE RECENT EXCHANGES WERE MORE THAN A NEW ROUND OF POLEMICS, NOR TO SUGGEST THAT THE SUPREME SOVIET MESSAGE AND THE APRIL 1 PRAVDA ARTICLE WERE A GENUINE SOVIET ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS OR TO MOVE THINGS FORWARD. HE SAID THAT THE APRIL 1 PRAVDA ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED TO EXPLAIN IN DETAIL THE SOVIET POSITION AND TO CORRECT ANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY THE CHINESE NOTE PUBLISHED ON 26 MARCH. IN PARTICULAR, THE ARTICLE WAS DESIGNED TO PREVENT FURTHER SPECULATION ABOUT WHAT HAD REALLY HAPPENED IN AND SINCE SEPTEMBER 1969 ON THE BORDER ISSUE.

3. ASKED ABOUT THE TREATY BASIS FOR THE PRESENT BORDER, CONFIDENTIAL

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POTAPENKO REPLIED THAT THE REFERENCE TO "TREATY DOCUMENTS" IN THE PRAVDA ARTICLE, RATHER THAN SIMPLY TO TREATIES, REFLECTED THE FACT THAT BESIDES THE BASIC TREATIES OF 1858, 1860, 1881, ETC., THERE WAS A WHOLE MASS OF OTHER DOCUMENTS INCLUDING EXCHANGES OF LETTERS, PROTOCOLS, NOTES AND OTHER MATERIALS. HE SAID THAT THE BORDER NEGOTIATIONS WERE FORMALLY STILL CONTINUING, IN THAT A PART OF THE SOVIET DELEGATION REMAINED IN PEKING, BUT THAT NO PRACTICAL BUSINESS WAS BEING CONDUCTED SINCE AT THE INSISTENCE OF THE CHINESE THIS CFMULD ONLY BE DONE AT THE LEVEL OF HEADS OF DELEGATION AND IL'ICHEV WAS STILL IN MOSCOW. HE DID NOT SUGGEST THAT THERE WAS ANY EARLY PROSPECT OF HIS RETURNING TO PEKING AND, WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE PRAVDA ARTICLE WAS THOUGHT LIKELY TO HELP MATTERS, HE REPLIED IN EFFECT THAT THE CHINESE HAD STARTED IT.

4. MORE GENERALLY, POTAPENKO SAID THAT SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS REMAINED THE SAME AS LAST YEAR AND THE YEAR BEFORE THAT. THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE SOVIET POSITION AS IT HAD BEEN SET OUT AT THE 25TH CPSU CONGRESS, AND NO REAL CHANGE IN THE CHINESE ATTITUDE

TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION EITHER. NOR FOR THE MOMENT WAS
THERE ANY PROSPECT OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN RELATIONS.
POLEMICS WOULD CONTINUE AND MIGHT GET WORSE. THE STRUGGLE
FOR INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE WOULD CONTINUE. BUT THERE
WERE FOR THE MOMENT NO AREAS OF DIRECT CONFRONTATION.
THE LEVEL OF TRADE MOVED UP AND DOWN TO A CERTAIN
EXTENT BUT AGAIN, AS FAR AS HE COULD SEE, THERE HAD
NOT BEEN NOR WOULD THERE BE ANY REAL CHANGE. IF THERE
HAD BEEN CHANGES IN THE SCENE AT ALL, THESE HAD
OCCURRED IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY, WHERE NOW

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EVEN MORE EMPHASIS WAS BEING PUT ON ATTEMPTS TO AGGRA-
VATE THE WORLD SITUATION. THERE WAS LESS EMPHASIS
ON THE IDEA OF AN IMMINENT SINO-SOVIET CLASH AND MORE
ON WHAT THE CHINESE SAW AS THE IMPENDING CLASH BETWEEN
THE U.S. AND THE USSR IN EUROPE.

5. POTAPENKO AGREED THAT CHINESE DIPLOMACY HAD RECENTLY
BEEN MORE ACTIVE IN ASIA, PARTICULARLY IN SOUTH EAST
ASIA (WHERE GREAT RELIANCE WAS PLACED ON OVERSEAS
CHINESE), JAPAN AND INDIA. THERE HAD EVEN BEEN SOME

CHINESE TALK OF SETTING UP AN "ASIAN FORUM", BUT HE HAD
HEARD NOTHING CONCRETE ABOUT WHAT FORM THE CHINESE
THOUGHT IT SHOULD TAKE. THE EXACT CHINESE POSITION ON
THE VIETNAMESE-CAMBODIA CONFLICT WAS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS,
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BUT IT COULD BE SAID THAT THE CHINESE WERE NOT ON
THE SIDE OF THE VIETNAMESE. HE AGREED THAT THE CON-
FLICT WAS DYING DOWN, PRAISED THE VIETNAMESE POLICY
IN FAVOR OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AND SAID HE THOUGHT
THE PROBLEMS COULD BE RESOLVED SUCCESSFULLY AS LONG AS
THE CHINESE DID NOT MAKE MISCHIEF.

6. AS FAR AS CHINESE INTERNAL POLICY WAS CONCERNED,
POTAPENKO AGREED THAT THERE WAS A MOVE TOWARDS GREATER
PRAGMATISM BUT COMMENTED THAT IT WAS STILL AT A VERY
EARLY STAGE. IT WAS SIGNIFICANT THAT AT THE NATIONAL
PEOPLE'S CONGRESS HUA HAD TALKED ONLY OF WHAT CHINA
MUST DO. HE HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO SAY MUCH ABOUT WHAT
CHINA WAS DOING. ASKED WHETHER A CHINESE DESIRE FOR A
GREAT ECONOMIC LEAP FORWARD COULD LEAD TO A CHINESE
DESIRE FOR MORE ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH THE SOVIET
UNION, POTAPENKO SAID THAT CHINA WAS COUNTING ON THE
WEST. THE CHINESE WERE INTERESTED IN BUYING TECHNOLOGY
AND WEAPONS IN THE WEST. THE POSSIBILITY OF ASSISTANCE
TO CHINA WAS OF COURSE A MUCH-DISCUSSED QUESTION IN THE
WEST, INCLUDING IN BRITAIN WHERE THE IDEA OF HELPING
CHINA, IN PARTICULAR SELLING HER MILITARY AIRCRAFT, HAD
BEEN DISCUSSED IN PARLIAMENT. THE WEST HAD TO DECIDE
WHETHER IT WAS WILLING TO HELP CHINA, BUT WESTERN
GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSMEN SHOULD REMEMBER THAT CHINA
WAS NOT IN A POSITION TO CONCLUDE LARGE SCALE DEALS,
WHETHER MILITARY OR INDUSTRIAL. THEY WANTED ONLY
EXAMPLES OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND OF ADVANCED WEAPONS
SO THAT THEY COULD MAKE THEIR OWN COPIES. THIS WOULD
NOT BE PROFITABLE FOR THE WEST. POTAPENKO WAS
UNIMPRESSED BY THE SUGGESTION THAT CHINA, IN THE LIGHT
OF THE RECENT AGREEMENT, MIGHT LOOK PARTICULARLY TO
JAPAN FOR HELP IN ECONOMIC INSTRUCTION, POINTING OUT
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THAT WHILE JAPAN WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE AN IMPORTANT
SUPPLIER, SHE DID NOT HAVE SOME OF THE TECHNOLOGY,
FOR EXAMPLE IN OIL EXPLOITATION, WHICH THE CHINESE
NEEDED.

7. POTAPENKO SAID HE DID NOT THINK IT WOULD BE CORRECT TO DESCRIBE THE SITUATION IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP AS STABLE. THERE WAS AS YET NO REAL AGREEMENT ON WHAT CHINA'S PROBLEMS WERE, LET ALONE ON WHAT THE SOLUTIONS SHOULD BE. HUA AND TENG HAD CLEARLY REACHED A MODUS VIVENDI, BUT THEIR THEORETICAL DIFFERENCES REMAINED VERY WIDE. ASKED WHETHER HE THOUGHT THERE WERE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP ABOUT RELATIONS TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION, POTAPENKO SAID ONLY HE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW THE ANSWER. BUT HE ADDED THAT TRACES OF DIFFERENCES OVER FOREIGN POLICY COULD BE DETECTED, FOR EXAMPLE BETWEEN TENG AND LI HSIEN-NIEN OVER WHEN AND WHERE WORLD WAR WOULD START. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE WHETHER HUA'S OR TENG'S PROSPECTS WERE BETTER FOR THE FUTURE, BUT AGREED THAT HUA COULD AFFORD TO WAIT. HE ADDED THAT THE OLDER ELEMENTS IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP WERE VERY ANXIOUS TO AVOID NEW LEADERSHIP CLASHES FOR THE TIME BEING.

8. COMMENT: WE READ WITH INTEREST AMBASSADOR IL'ICHEV'S WARNINGS IN BANGKOK ABOUT CHINESE INTENTIONS (REFTEL). IL'ICHEV'S STATEMENTS COINCIDE WITH SIMILAR WARNINGS MADE BY THE SOVIET PRESS AND, PERIODICALLY, BY SOVIET OFFICIALS IN PRIVATE OVER CHINESE PRONOUNCEMENTS ON POSSIBILITY OF WWII AND PEKING'S EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE A WORLD-WIDE ANTI-SOVIET FRONT. AT THE SAME TIME, IN DISCUSSIONS WITH FOREIGN DIPLOMATS HERE, SOVIET

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OFFICIALS WILL OFTEN DOWNPLAY THE POSSIBILITIES OF A WORSENING OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS OR A SINO-SOVIET CONFRONTATION. POTAPENKO DID IT IN THE CONVERSATION REPORTED THIS MESSAGE (PARA 4). HIS SUPERIOR, I. KUBASOV, DID SO IN A MARCH 24 CONVERSATION WITH A JAPANESE DIPLOMAT HERE. CHINESE DIPLOMATS ARE TELLING THEIR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES IN MOSCOW THAT THE RECENT INTENSIFICATION OF SINO-SOVIET POLEMICS DOES NOT MEAN THAT RELATIONS ARE DETERIORATING. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DOWNGRADING BY BOTH SIDES OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INCREASED SINO-SOVIET COMPETITION IN THE WORLD ARENA AND IN PROPAGANDA ATTACKS COULD BE DIRECTED TOWARD DISSUADING OTHERS FROM EXPLOITING THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. NEVERTHELESS, IT APPEARS THAT RELATIONS ARE NOT AS CONFIDENTIAL

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